

ENCHANTED BOOKSHELF *by* Wm. P. McGivern

fantastic

ADVENTURES

MARCH
25c



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by DWIGHT V. SWAIN

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**If this was the brain of a Martian
dead millions of years, how
could it be alive? How could it
keep on growing?**



THE BLACK BRAIN

By TARLETON FISKE

"H'E'S brought me a brain," Hilton whispered. "A black brain!"

I stared into that cold grey face and wondered what madness lurked beneath the intensity of his eyes.

"Think of it," Hilton mumbled. "A black brain from Mars."

I thought of it and turned away. My own eyes stared at the grinning faces of the shrunken *dworp*-heads from Jupiter that hung from the walls, at the colossal skeleton of the giant *qtella*

from the Saturnic ooze.

It was a long moment before I could look at Dennis Hilton again. He was smiling. He hugged his triumph, gloated over it, chuckled again.

"A black brain," he crooned. "A brain from Mars."

I thought vaguely of calling a physician. But you don't easily question the sanity of a man like Dennis Hilton—the "Uranium King" himself—the famous interplanetary financier.

That's what the telepapers called him.

Not only was the brain alive and growing, it was powerfull
It would have to be destroyed.



That's what the public thought he was. I suppose I am one of the few friends who know him in his true guise, as a man with an obsession. You couldn't call it a hobby, really. Dennis Hilton had an actual passion for collecting.

We sat now in his private sanctum. Sanctum? More truthfully, it was Hilton's private museum. All around the vast chamber were the trophy-cases, the wall chests, the display tables holding Hilton's prizes.

Jewels from the Martian deserts, stuffed *ekis* from Venus, mummified *dringi* from the caves on the dark side of the Moon . . . pottery from Vlakka, statuary from the crypts of Ignis, rare parchments found in the seas of Yabar. Osseous, geologic, paleontological remains . . . fragments of the forgotten cultures of a dozen planets . . . plunder from half a hundred asteroids and a score of satellites . . . and now, Dennis Hilton sitting there before me and mumbling, "He brought me a black brain from Mars."

I snapped out of it.

"Wait a minute, now," I said. "You flashed me in such a hurry I didn't get a chance to ask any questions. You told me nothing when I landed on the roof. All I've managed to get out of you here is something about securing a black brain. Let's start at the beginning, shall we?"

DENNIS HILTON sat back, lighted a *sybarette*, and smiled. In a moment the mask of self-consciousness slipped over his heavy, sagging grey face. He was once again the financier, the authority, the man of the cosmos.

"Sorry," he apologized with a chuckle as ingenuous as it was false. "Guess I'm a little excited, that's all. As one collector to another—you understand."

"I collect facts," I told him, dryly.

"I'm just an author, not a Uranium King. And so far I haven't heard any facts."

"Allow me to remedy that," said Hilton. "To begin with, I got the brain from Arnold Kress."

"You got the brain from *who*?" I exploded.

"Arnold Kress." Hilton repeated the name with a smile of triumph. "Yes, I know how peculiar that must sound. Kress and I have been rivals for years. Business rivals—and rivals in our hobby, as well. He's always had the jump on me, too. As owner of Transplanetary, Incorporated, he has been able to organize his own private expeditions. To Mars, the Moon, Venus, and all points solar. Always coming back with ridiculous televisual poses showing him standing there with a new trophy tucked under one arm.

"As for me, you know how I've gone about my collecting. The skippers of my own fleet have to pick up the items for me. I've sent out my own private archeologists and planeticians, too. But Kress has always been able to lord it over me because he bagged his own trophies, as it were."

I held up my hand and halted his tirade.

"I know all this," I said. "Get to the point. Why did Arnold Kress honor you with this gift, and where did he get it?"

"He got it on Mars, and he gave it to me because he was afraid," Hilton replied.

"Afraid? Afraid of what?"

"You'll see soon enough," Hilton told me. "But first, you wanted facts. Kress went out about three months ago. Some operator of his up near Dalil gave him the tip. You know the Dalil deserts? Beyond the Great Chasm?"

"Dangerous territory, isn't it? Unexplored?"

"Right. That only made Kress keener to be the first. As I understand it, his expedition was very elaborately organized. He made the desert crossing, all right. Got to the caves beyond."

"What caves?"

"The caves where he found the brain. Claims to have discovered a totally new lost Martian civilization there. Nothing alive, you understand, but remnants of immense ethnological value. Quite a contribution to interplanetary history and culture, as he tells it. Some of his professorial hirelings are probably writing up his findings for monographs."

"But all Kress actually achieved was the discovery of the brain. It was sitting in the cave. I've tried to get further details from him, but he's devilishly reticent. Not only reticent, but frightened."

"Frightened?"

"Yes." Again Hilton chuckled. "Imagine that—a big bad interplanetary buccaneer like Arnold Kress, afraid of his own shadow! And admitting it to me, his rival!"

"Facts," I prompted him.

"There aren't many more. From hints Kress dropped, his expedition left the caves beyond the Great Chasm in something of a hurry. Several men seem to have died in the Dalil desert crossing. The voyage back was something of an ordeal too, it seems. Fever got two of his staff planeticians—I gather it was the two who were assigned to tend and study the black brain."

"Study it?"

"We'll get to that, also," Hilton told me. "At any rate, when Kress returned, he was a frightened man. Whether he had some idea that the black brain was a jinx, in the way that ancient Egyptologists thought mummies were hoodoos, I don't know. When he came to me he merely offered me the

black brain. But he seemed quite sincere in warning me that the thing seemed bewitched. He said he wished he had never removed it from its cave. In fact, he went further than that and said he is going to give up collecting. And by no means will he ever make another expedition to Mars."

"Where is he now?" I asked.

"He went up to his private estate to recuperate, under the care of a physician. Personally, I think Arnold Kress is a sick man. I believe his present attitude—his delusions about the brain—spring from a serious ailment. Frankly, some of the things he said to me weren't exactly sane."

I ROSE to my feet.

"You know what you're doing to me, don't you?" I asked Hilton. "You're giving me the most damnable itch to see this black brain of yours. All this romantic buildup and air of mystery."

"Come on, then," Hilton urged. "I'll let you peek at it. But I warn you, you're due for a shock."

Dennis Hilton led the way down the long hall. He paused before the bronze doors of a further chamber and knocked.

Kiti answered his summons and opened the door.

I shouldn't mention Kiti, I suppose. But that no longer matters now. Kiti was a Berian—a Venusian from the warm cities. Despite interplanetary codes on immigration, Dennis Hilton had smuggled him in as a personal servant. Berians, as all reports show, make the best of all possible servants, combining dog-like docility with utter devotion to their masters. Hilton was a man who liked unquestioning obedience. Hence, Kiti.

Still, I got a shock when he opened the door. You never get used to a

Berian. It isn't their faces, though the single eye is bad enough. It's that greenish complexion, the dwarfed, stooping posture, and the claw-like fingers that arouse some instinctive repulsion in all earth-dwellers.

"Yess?" hissed Kiti.

"We're going to look at the brain," said Hilton.

He moved forward. But Kiti didn't get out of the doorway.

"Here, now!" Hilton snapped.

"Please. Please, Master. Do not enter here." The soft, servile voice held a note of entreaty.

"What's this?" asked Hilton, in genuine astonishment.

"Please do not go to the brain. The brain wants you to go. It is not well to obey it. Please do not go to the brain."

"Berians!" Hilton muttered to me, under his breath. "Excellent servants, but really little better than cretins according to earth standards. They get these delusions."

He shouldered the little green man aside.

"This way," he called. I followed him into another room. It was a room I'd never seen before—or had I? Of course! This had once been a guest chamber; parlor and bedroom. Now its walls were tiled, antiseptically white. It looked like a surgical theater, or a scientific laboratory. Laboratory? But why?

We went towards the second door.

Hilton turned a face filled with triumph towards me.

"Here it is," he whispered exultantly. "The black brain from Mars."

I stepped into that room. I stared at that table. I gazed at that great inverted glass bell suspended on chains from the high ceiling. I gazed *into* that bell.

I saw the black brain.

I screamed.

The transparent glass bell . . . it was hanging from the ceiling on the chains like a huge bowl, ten feet wide. And within the crystal prison, strands of ebon horror clawing inkily in a frantic effort to escape, was the living, throbbing, pulsating midnight mass of the black brain!

"*It's alive!*" I gasped.

HILTON turned to me. His cold grey face held a mocking grin.

"That's the surprise I promised you. That's the best fact of all, isn't it? The brain is alive. Yes, alive!"

I forced myself to stare again at the serpentine horror. To my trembling gaze it looked like a Medusa's nest—like an octopus—like an ever-changing blob of monstrous protoplasmic slime—like anything but a brain.

"Can you conceive of the organism that once held *this* encased in a sentient skull?" Hilton gloated. "What manner of being could control, and be controlled, by this brain?"

It was a question I didn't want to ponder on. And there were other questions, equally pressing, and equally unpleasant.

I couldn't hold back the obvious one, however.

"What keeps it alive?" I asked.

I stared, searching vainly for clamps, sutures, for an electro-attachment such as surgeons use in keeping animal brains alive. There was nothing. Nor did there seem to be any saline solution in the clear, shallow watery liquid at the bottom of the inverted glass compartment.

"I don't know, exactly." Hilton answered my question slowly. "Arnold Kress found it this way, or says he did. The brain was in the cave. In a bowl—this bowl, to be exact."

"Let me get this straight," I said.

"Kress discovers this bowl in a cave beyond the Great Chasm of Mars, sitting all alone in the ruins of a bygone civilization. No one to tend to it, no evidence as to how it got there, no clue as to why it managed to stay—alive—if it is alive. That's pretty hard to swallow."

For answer, Hilton pointed to the black blob behind the glass.

"There it is," he whispered.

And there it was. Throbbing ceaselessly, its nerve-endings undulating like tentacles, the black brain seethed.

"Are you sure it's a brain?" I asked. "How do you know it isn't some weird ultra-terrestrial life form? Some macro-cosmic cell, or a sea denizen?"

"Look at the convolutions in the mass." Hilton unconsciously assumed a lecturing attitude as he walked around the suspended glass bowl. "Here is a definite line of demarcation between the cerebrum and cerebellum. And note the prominence of what is unmistakably the medulla oblongata. These fissures are well-pronounced. The infinity of convolutions betokens considerable intelligence. Naturally the intelligence isn't human, or even mundane. Yet the men in Kress's party unanimously recognized the mass as being the living brain of what was once a conscious organism."

Despite my inexplicable fear, I stepped closer. I was able to recognize the truth of what Hilton was telling me. Yes, it was a brain—not the small grey sponge of a human, but the black, alien, giant brain of some unknown monstrosity from another world.

"Fascinating, isn't it?" Hilton remarked.

I shook my head. "Horrible," I said.

"Nevertheless, it's a prize. A remarkable specimen. I will study it."

"Why don't you turn it over to the

authorities?" I asked.

Hilton frowned. His was the indignation of a born collector.

"It's mine," he insisted. "I intend to keep it."

I SHRUGGED, turned to go. At the door I paused.

"By the way," I remarked. "You said that Arnold Kress had some delusions about the brain? What exactly do you mean?"

Hilton hesitated before he answered. "Oh, nothing much. He thought perhaps the brain had been preserved as a sort of god by the forgotten peoples of the cave cities. He thought that it—well, you know the fancies a sick mind indulges in."

I let it go at that.

"Let me know if you find out anything," I told Hilton, as I left the room.

Going through the hall I encountered Kiti, crouching against the doorway in the darkness. There was a look of abject fear on his livid little face.

I fancied that Arnold Kress wasn't the only one who had strange fancies about the black brain in the bowl. Kiti had them, too.

And that night, when the memory of that dark and living horror came to slither through my dreams, I wondered whether or not those fancies might be true.

2.

"KRESS has disappeared!"

Just three words. Three words, casually dropped by Spencer, at my office.

Yet for some reason the chills were racing up my spine.

I tried to be casual as I pumped Spencer for information. He didn't know much. Got the news over the

telepapers this morning. Kress had left his private sanitarium. There was a hint that he had not exactly "left" in the ordinary sense of the word. "Escaped" was a better choice. Because he had been under observation for an "acute mental disturbance."

In a flash, I associated the story with what Hilton had told me. Kress was more than a bit disturbed—he was mad! And he had escaped.

Of course it wasn't my business, really. Or was it? Anyone who had seen that black monstrosity in the bowl would make it his business to find out anything connected with it. And Kress had gone mad because he'd found it.

That's why I could hardly wait until evening to pay a call on Dennis Hilton.

Hilton answered the door himself.

"Where's Kiti?" I asked.

Hilton sighed. "The crazy fool!" he said. "He left this morning. Couldn't argue him out of it, either. Wouldn't stay in the same place with the thing."

"The brain?"

"Yes."

I entered the hall. "But where could he go, Hilton? You certainly weren't fool enough to turn him loose outside. The authorities would nab you for that soon enough. Illegal entry of planetary visitors, and all that."

"I arranged to send him back to Venus on the afternoon flight," Hilton told me. "But it leaves me short-handed here. And I'm worried."

"Worried? What about?"

Hilton answered me as he plodded on ahead. Without my asking, he was leading me straight into the chamber that housed the black brain.

"This," said Hilton, opening the door and gesturing me in.

I stepped under the brilliant lights, stared around the white-tiled room, gaped at the glass bowl hanging from

the chains in the ceiling.

THE brain was there, bubbling blackly as it had in my midnight dreams. It contracted and expanded rhythmically, like some enormous black heart—an evil heart, nourished on unthinkable things. I watched it pulsate. Today the tendrils; nerve-endings, or whatever they might be, were not waving. The entire mass seemed sluggish, and except for the ceaseless throbbing, it lay quiescent at the bottom of the huge bowl.

Hilton watched my eyes. Then he coughed. "Notice anything?" he asked. His voice was strangely husky.

"Why—no—that is—" I stared again. I *did* notice something!

"It's bigger," I said.

Hilton's pallor was ghastly. He couldn't keep the forced smile on his lips. "You see it too?" he whispered.

"Much bigger," I said. "Why?"

"I don't know. And it frightens me. You see, Kress said that, too. The brain gets bigger. Look at it—nearly six feet in bulk! Kress told me, and I laughed at him."

The words recalled my mission.

"Kress," I said. "He's escaped."

"What's that?"

"Don't you know?"

Hilton shook his head.

I broke the story as I'd heard it. "I thought he'd come here to you," I admitted. "That's why I stopped in."

"This is serious," Hilton murmured. He lit a *sybarette* with a nervous gesture. "Come on, we'll go into my den and see what must be done. Can't have Kress running around like this. He needs the proper attention."

We went out, down the hall, entered the den. I found a chair in the midst of the museum display and sat down. As I did so, my knee knocked against a stick. It fell to the floor with a clatter.

I stooped, picked it up. The object was a cane, with a silver handle. It looked vaguely familiar.

Kress! Arnold Kress always carried a silver-handled cane! Every telephoto showed him with his stick. My fingers ran over the silver head, encountered grooves on the surface. I looked down. My eyes read the initials. "A. K."

My eyes rose, to encounter the shocked stare of Dennis Hilton.

"All right," he sighed. "I'll admit it. Kress was here."

"When?"

"This afternoon. He left about an hour ago. Oh, don't look at me like that! I did my best, tried to persuade him to return to the sanitarium. But he's mad, I tell you, utterly mad."

Hilton must have read my face.

"Perfectly harmless, though," he hastened on. "Simply delusions of persecution, that's all. He wants to go away, to escape."

"Escape from what?"

"From the brain, of course." Hilton sat down heavily on a sofa. He thinks the brain is calling to him."

"Calling to him?" I echoed his words in utter mystification.

"Yes. That's what Kiti believed. That the brain is not only alive, but powerful. That it calls—telepathically. A sort of radioactive emanation that results in a hypnotic pull.

"That's why he gave the brain to me," Kress admitted. "He thought he could get away from it. He doesn't like me of course, and he usually never comes near my house. So he thought if I had the brain he might pull free of it. But he can't—he says. The brain called to him and he had to escape. He couldn't get away. It called to him."

"You don't sound much better yourself," I said, candidly. "I'm afraid you're a candidate for a strait jacket yourself."

"Don't say that!" Hilton was on his feet, his face convulsed. "Don't say that to me! I suppose you think I'm crazy, eh? That I just imagine the brain is growing? That I just imagine it whispers inside of my head and tells me to—"

HE stopped.

"Go ahead, Hilton," I murmured. "What does the brain whisper to you?"

"Nothing." He sat down again, hastily. "Nothing. I don't know what I'm talking about, I guess. All this is too much of a shock to me. I wish you could have seen the look on Kress's face when he came here. I listened to what he whispered about the brain. He does believe it was a god of some kind, away in that other world. And he said it must have called the guides to come to it.

"They were almost lost beyond the Great Chasm, he said, though the guides wouldn't admit it. And then they seemed to go forward all at once as though they were being—directed. They came to the caves through an unbelievable maze, and found the brain right away. Because it called to them. Kress told me it wanted to be found. It wanted to go out into the cosmos again. To a world where it could find other minds to call to. A world where it could grow. Where it could grow. God!

"Why does it grow? When will it stop growing? How can I make it stop?"

I had the answer to that one.

"Destroy it," I said.

"No. I couldn't do that." Hilton was obviously sincere. "It's too important a finding to destroy."

I twirled Arnold Kress's cane. "Hilton," I said, softly. "Why do you think the black brain grows?"

"Do you want to know?" Hilton whispered. "Do you really want to know?"

I nodded.

"I think it feeds," he murmured. "I think it feeds on the minds of men. That it drains their thoughts, their urges, their emotions. That it grows by drawing the power from other brains. Like a black vampire. Yes, a black vampire, that's what it is!"

"Believing that," I said—still softly—"do you think it is wise to keep it here?"

Hilton gulped. "You're right." His voice was almost inaudible. "Yes, I can see you're right. It must be destroyed. Will you come back again tomorrow? We shall do it together, you and I. Right now, I don't think I could stand seeing it again. But tomorrow evening, at eight. Bring a gun."

It was a pleasant invitation. And thinking of that growing monstrosity—that black vampire, as Hilton called it—it was an invitation I fully determined to keep.

I KNOCKED on Hilton's door at five minutes to eight. At eight o'clock I put my shoulder to it, and battered it open in blind panic.

The feeling had been with me all through the day. Something was wrong. Something was utterly wrong.

Now I knew it. Hilton didn't answer the door.

The hallway was dark. The entire downstairs was dark. No servants, human or otherwise, greeted me.

And no voice answered my shouts as I summoned Dennis Hilton.

I raced up the stairs through the pitch-blackness of that empty house, switched on every light at the top of the stairway. Hilton's room was empty. The house was deserted.

I made for the den, the museum trophy room. Nobody there. I stood in the doorway, glancing around quickly before I turned away.

Then I saw the paper on the table.

The paper was crumpled. The handwriting was so shaky it took me a full minute to recognize it as Dennis Hilton's penmanship. But the message hit me at once. Just two words, scrawled in a sprawling hand.

"Get out!"

Never have I received more excellent advice. And it was advice I meant to act on. For some reason, panic gripped me. I had no intention of going down that hall and looking at the brain in the bowl.

I would leave now, and return with the police. That was the sensible way—the only sane way. Somehow the thought of facing that sinister entity in the room beyond was terrifying in a way I couldn't analyze. But I loathed the very thought of the black brain. The black brain, pulsing there, throbbing endlessly through uncounted eons of ghastly life; growing and growing, and preying on the minds of men with a dark, unhuman appetite.

I carried that thought with me as I turned and left the doorway.

Then I lost that thought.

I lost *every* thought.

Now I could only *feel*.

For the house was throbbing about me. Yes, the house—the floors, the walls, everything, was pulsing. Pulsing in a weird rhythm. A thumping. A contraction-expansion. *Like the brain.*

The very air seemed to move in a hideously alien tempo of its own. It blew back and forth. It hummed with a tension. The tension of a purring dynamo, of a deathless machine. A machine that pulsed and throbbed. *Like the brain.*

My own body seemed gripped by a similar compulsion. The blood sang in my veins. I was conscious of an altered rhythm in my pulse. My heart pounded. My breathing altered to conform to the beats. And my head seemed squeezed and then released at every pulsation. Every pulsation of that ceaseless ebb and flow. *Like the brain.*

Now, through the feeling came the voice.

I thought it was a voice at first. Then I realized that it was not a voice I heard. I *heard* nothing. The voice was *felt*. I felt the voice inside me. Whispering. Urging. Commanding.

"Come."

Every expansion, every contraction, each beat of the insistent rhythm, drove that command into my consciousness.

"Come."

(Continued on page 236)

GERMAN



WAR SECRET



DISCOVERED

AS WE all know, much of Germany's success in the present war is due to the skill of her scientists who have invented and perfected many implements of war without which Mr. Schicklegruber would never have had the audacity to even attempt to conquer the world. Movies and stories all tell of Germany's mighty planes and tank corps, but one weapon that is seldom mentioned, but was feared by the allies was the highly efficient anti-tank gun that played havoc within the British tank corps during the African campaign.

But this secret weapon is now an open book to the allies for many of the guns were captured in perfect condition together with their special type ammunition in Libya.

According to reports that have been issued since the guns were captured, the Germans had simply used the commonly known fact that velocity aids the penetrating force of a moving body. They have adapted this principle to produce several different guns that had shells with sufficient velocity to bore right through tank armor. Their most dangerous gun is the 88 millimeter piece that can be used either to fight tanks or aircraft. In all appearances it closely resembles a huge naval gun and it can put a hole in three inches of armor with the ease of a hot knife going through butter. However, it has one defect of being very big and heavy which affects its maneuverability and thus it is easier for the enemy to "knock it out." To compromise on a gun that would be effective yet easy to handle, the German war scientists developed the 50 millimeter gun. The whole power of the gun does not lie in the high velocity it gives its shells but much of its effectiveness is due

to the type of shells it uses. According to one of the officers who examined the gun and its shells, the shells can be best described as using the trick of driving a needle through a penny by first pushing the needle through a cork so that it can't bend or break. Thus the entire shell weighs almost four and a half pounds, while the part that does all the boring into the armor is about the size of a man's thumb. In place of the long steel projectile found on regular shells, these anti-tank shells have only a long, thin, sharp point jutting out from the center of the casing, with a square shoulder around the base to give it necessary balance.

The shell does its dirty work in three steps. First of all the needle point comes into contact with the surface of the tank's armor and thus all the force of the impact is centered on one spot with the result that the surface is cracked. Next the cylinder of soft metal that surrounds the bullet compresses all about the point and this prevents the shot from slithering off the tank. Lastly the shot that does the boring rushes through the soft metal and hits the armor plate at the instant that the needle point is placing the greatest possible strain on the plate. Once the shot gets inside the tank, it moves about like a drunken driver, ricocheting from one surface to another, and leaving death and destruction in its wake.

Many observers of this gun in action regard this piece of booty to be as important as any yet captured by the allies and soon this gun or at least its principles will be fighting on the side of the allies to bring victory more quickly for our side.

—T. Borr.

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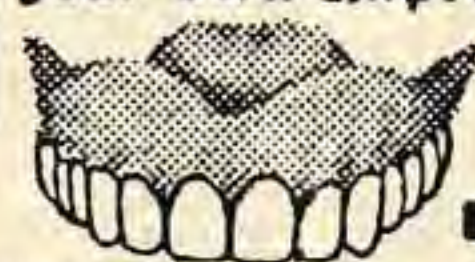
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- (2) "The Perfect Husband"—Dwight V. Swain.
- (3) Freddie Funk's "Madcap Mermaid" ties for third place with "Lefty Feep Catches Hell" and "Saunders' Strange Second Sight." Six humorous stories this issue. Good, Ed. Keep printing humorous stories. That's the stuff, old boy.
- (4) The fourth place goes to "Mister Trouble." O'Brien had a neat tale here.
- (5) "Sammy Calls a Noobus"—Norton. Ray O'Connor is right. This whole story fell right out of the mag. Not enough staples, or sumpin'. That illustration by Jay Jackson proves that he can do better than most of that stuff he turns out.

I see that you are using more of Rod Ruth, at long last. He's one of your best illustrators, in fact, he's as good as Finley, and that's GOOD. (Yes, Finley is better than Magarian.)

Fuqua's illustrations aren't being used often enough. I like his pics better than A. K. Binder's or Jones'.

Don't use Ben Day tints like you did on P. 182-183. They may look good on the funnies, but—well, *they steenk in an illustration.* (There I said it.)

Here's hoping every issue will be like this last one.

GERALD WAIBLE,
1219 N. E. Roselawn St.,
Portland, Oregon.

"The Man With Five Lives" in the January issue has caused a lot of favorable comment. As for the humorous stories you like so well, Gerald, we'll try to have a couple each issue.—Ed.

THE BLACK BRAIN (Continued from page 237)

It was the brain. The brain that had called to Arnold Kress. The brain that had called to Kiti. The brain that might have called to Dennis Hilton. And now it was calling to me.

"Come."

I WALKED down the hall. The gun in my pocket was forgotten. My original intention was forgotten. My very name, my being, was lost to me in the strength of that hypnotic command.

I passed the outer tiled chamber, where the light blazed. Like a man in a trance, I walked through the open doorway and stood before the brain.

The brain had grown. Its black bulk loomed ten feet, and towered along the glass sides of the huge bowl. I stood and stared mutely.

It was sucking my own brain, eating away my sanity. This I realized. I wondered how this would help it grow.

I wondered what would become of me—would I be left with a vacant mind, an empty shell? I wondered why I must stand before it so it could nourish itself.

All this I pondered, but I could not move. I could not resist, or run away. Even as I saw the brain swell, and thicken, I couldn't run. I was trapped. And the black brain billowed up—

I heard my name, then. *Felt* my name then. A voice that was not a voice—a voice that was only a thought within me—screamed, "Kill it! For God's sake, kill it before it gets you!"

I recognized Hilton's thought. The spell snapped. My hand went for the gun.

Even as I whipped it out, I saw things *happen*.

I saw the horrid suggestion of a *face* forming within those black and boiling depths. I saw the rudimentary nerve endings resolve into limbs and feelers that reached out to claw. I saw the utterly hellish suggestion of a great *mouth* . . . a grinning black maw, gaping in the depths of the throbbing mass.

I shot. I fired again and again. The bowl shattered into a million fragments, but I kept pumping—pumping into the writhing blackness of the huge monstrosity that slithered towards me even as I ripped it to dirty black ribbons.

In a moment it was over. I stared down at the bubbling, coagulated mass that was all that remained of the black brain. For a moment I fancied I saw something—but it must have been my own imagination.

Because I knew, suddenly, what had happened to the men lost on Kress's expedition. I knew what had happened to Kiti—who did not go back on the afternoon flight to Venus. I knew what had happened to Kress—who did not leave the house again after his escape. And staring at the mass on the floor, I

(Concluded on page 239)

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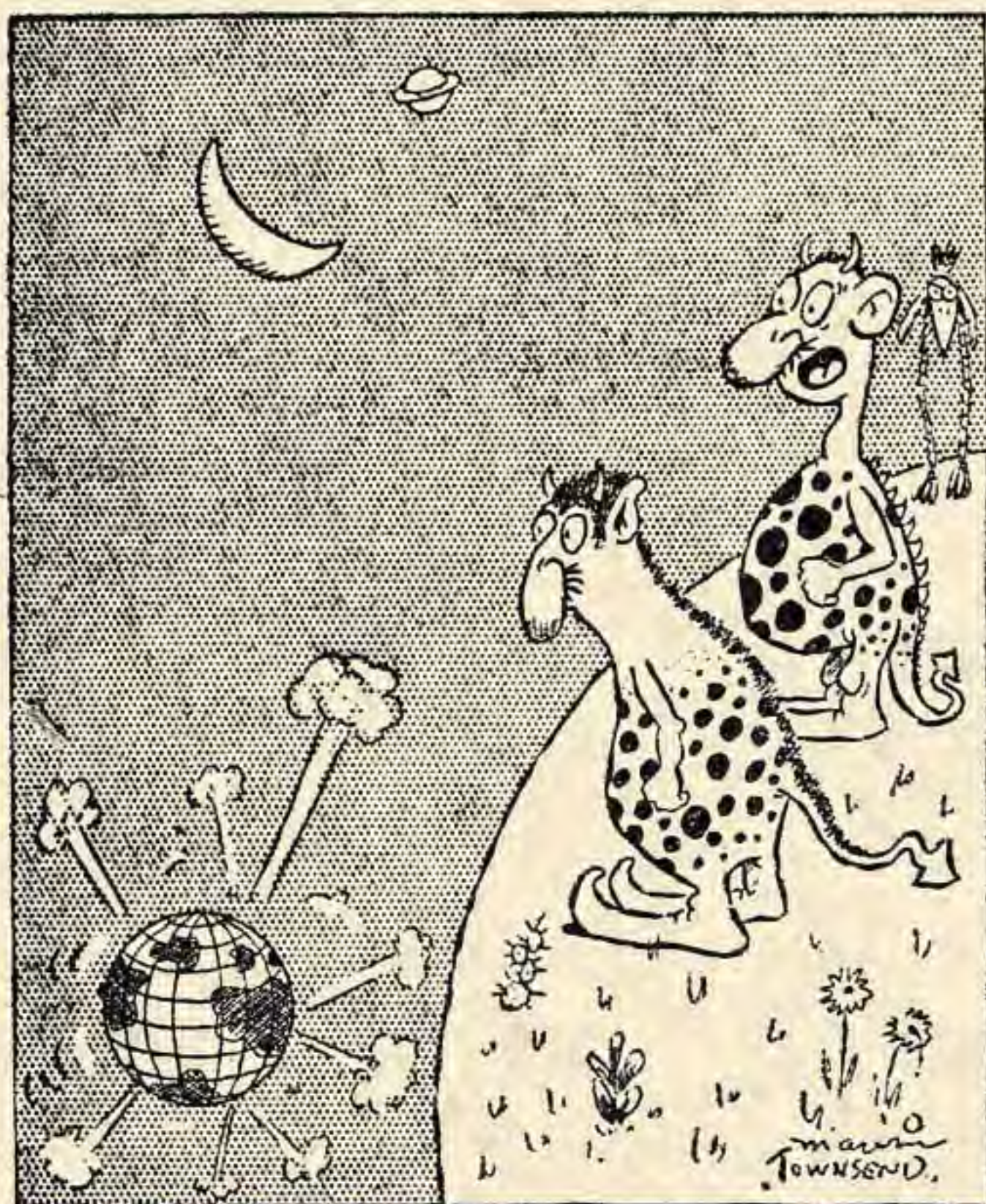
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"Maybe we should send them some missionaries!"

THE BLACK BRAIN

(Continued from page 237)

knew what had happened to Dennis Hilton after he had bid me goodbye last night. I knew what had called to him and brought him to this room to die.

That's why, in the bubbling ooze, I could almost imagine I caught one last ghastly glimpse of their faces . . . shifting momentarily through the dying liquid came the twisted countenances of the dead. The brain re-formed at the end, and I could see Hilton's tortured mouth—Hilton, whose thought somewhere inside the black brain had sent the message which saved me.

I knew now what the brain had wanted, and how it grew. Because they were all wrong.

No matter what the evidence, it wasn't a brain. It was an animal. An animal with a strange hypnotic power. And it had used this power to destroy them. Because animals must—eat!



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